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the WORLD ALLIANCE for INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE CHURCHES

the WORLD ALLIANCE of YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS

the WORLD'S YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

the WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION

the WORLD COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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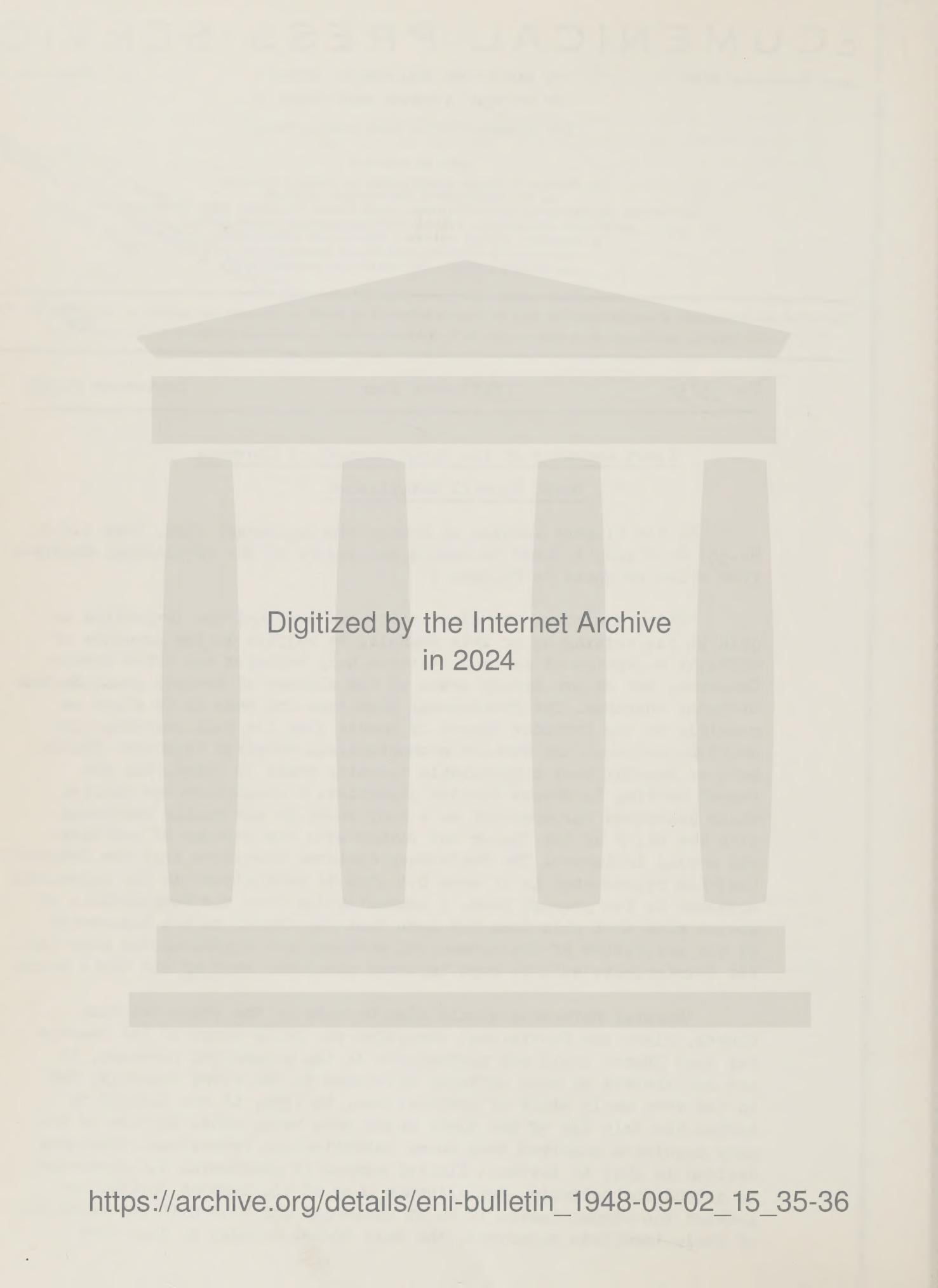
First Assembly of the World Council of Churches

World Council Established

At the Plenary Session on Monday Morning, August 23rd, (see E.P.S. No. 34) Dr. Visser't Hooft presented the report of the Provisional Committee from which we quote as follows :

"There are other Churches which have declined the invitation to join in the setting up of this Council. We rejoice in the presence of official delegates of several historic holy Orthodox and other Eastern Churches. But we are keenly aware of the absence of several great Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Provisional Committee had made it as clear as possible to the Orthodox Church of Russia that its full participation would be welcome. And certain communications received from that Church made us hopeful that a favourable decision would be taken. But the recent meeting in Moscow decided otherwise. A resolution was adopted which describes our movement as a body which is not really concerned with the unity of the Church but rather with the gaining of political and social influence. The Conference declared therefore that the Orthodox Churches represented in it were not able to participate in the ecumenical movement in its present form. A communication from the Patriarchate of Moscow adds that this does not mean that the Church is not interested in the activities of the ecumenical movement and expresses the hope that the Patriarchate will be kept informed about the work of the World Council.

"Special reference should also be made to the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Provisional Committee was fully aware of the reasons why that Church would not participate in the ecumenical movement, it was not invited to send official delegates to the first Assembly. But in the very early stage of preparations, in 1939, it was decided to inform the Holy See of the plans which were being made. In view of the many inquiries received from Roman Catholics, the Provisional Committee decided in 1947 to invite a limited number of unofficial R.C. observers to attend the Assembly. But although many of the persons invited expressed the strong desire to be at Amsterdam and that with the knowledge of their immediate superiors, the Holy Office decided in June that



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permission to go to Amsterdam would not be granted to anybody. This decision is all the more regrettable since in recent years many Roman Catholic priests and laymen have shown a very deep understanding of the purposes and character of our movement. In fact the interest which individual Roman Catholics have shown in this Assembly and which has expressed itself in requests for invitations, in articles and in personal visits, has been one of the most striking features of the period of preparation. It remains to be seen whether the 'veto' of the Holy Office means in fact that this new and more hopeful approach is implicitly condemned or whether there is a possibility for continued conversation. From the point of view of the World Council we must hope and pray that real opportunities for fruitful contact may remain in existence."

At the end of this meeting the World Council of Churches was officially constituted by an unanimous vote.

God's Design

Not a Marshal Plan

In a challenging and provocative address Professor Karl Barth of Basle (in the presence of Princess Juliana and Prince Bernard) on Monday, August 23 brought the Assembly face to face with deep issues. "Should we not come to the clear understanding", he asked, "that by 'God's Design' is really meant His plan; that is His already come, victorious, already founded Kingdom in all its majesty - our Lord Jesus Christ, who has already robbed sin and death, the devil and hell of their power, and already vindicated divine and human justice in His own person? That by 'God's Design' is therefore not meant the existence of the Church in the world, its task in relation to the world's disorder its outward and inward activity as an instrument for the amelioration of human life, or finally the result of this activity in the Christianization of all humanity and connected with this, the setting up of an order of justice and peace embracing our whole planet? That therefore by 'God's Design' is not meant something like a Christian Marshal Plan?"

Man not an Atlas

"I do not wish to weaken the earnestness, the goodwill and the hopes that have brought us here, but only to base them on their proper foundation, when I now say: We ought to give up, even on this first day of our deliberations, every thought that the care of the Church the care of the world, is our care. Burdened with this thought, we should straighten out nothing, we should only increase disorder in Church and world still more. For just this is the final root and ground of all human disorder; the dreadful, godless, ridiculous opinion that man is the Atlas who is destined to bear the dome of heaven on his shoulders."

Proof of Freedom

"What we can and ought to do in these days is simply this : we must be a proof 'in spirit and in power'. of how it is when a thousand Christians from all lands and peoples, of all tongues and confessions

gathered together in one congregation under present prevailing conditions stand by what they have so often heard and preached, in their several positions and various styles. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord and trust Him, and He will bring it to pass.' Must we not be willing to stand by it, thus giving the proof of the freedom which is bestowed upon us as a congregation of Jesus Christ?"

God's Word
Not ours

"All over the world people are cherishing the hope that at this Assembly a word may be spoken to the desperate need of the nations. If so, it must be God's word, and not ours."

This was the declaration of Professor C.H.Dodd of Cambridge, England's renowned Biblical scholar, at the Plenary Session of the Assembly. "The word of God in the Scriptures", he said, "does not come by way of dialogue. It is a conversation. We can best come to terms with it by joining in the conversation."

"Human nature in us is what it always was. We wrestle with the word, in company with His people in the past, until the grace and truth of God break through. Always, all through that moving dialogue and drama God is addressing us and asking for our response - a response which in the nature of things must be in action and not in words - the act of faith and obedience."

"In our time God addresses His people, as always in events He speaks especially, it would appear, in great historical crises which stir men out of complacency and inertia. It is no light or agreeable thing to hear the word of the Lord. It never was. It is a word of judgment. If we hear the word of God in this Assembly, we shall most certainly be judged by it. We are all implicated in a sinful situation. As we cannot contract out of its disagreeable and menacing consequences, so we cannot disassociate ourselves from the sinful causes that led up to it."

"One thing we as Christians can do for our distressed world is to accept our responsibility, and submit our whole way of life, realistically and intelligently, to the criticism of His word in the Scriptures, which is explicit and pointed enough."

State Reception

In the beautiful setting of the Rijksmuseum galleries the Netherlands Government offered hospitality to the World Council of Churches on Monday evening. The delegates were received by the Minister of Justice. By a happy coincidence the splendid permanent collection of the Rijksmuseum was augmented by a collection of pictures from the Pinakothek at Munich. In the spacious galleries delegates were able to mix freely and large groups were admiring Rembrandt's magnificent 'Nachtwache' in all its freshened splendour.

Worship is History

Worship is history, according to Professor Dodd at the Assembly's first Plenary Session. To contemplate "Christ in His coming - His words and deeds, His death and resurrection - we are in the presence of the whole history of our redemption. To bring us into the presence of these evangelical facts is a prime aim of Christian worship because it is in them that God has revealed Himself as supremely worshipful". Assembly worship is so planned to rehearse the drama of our redemption, leading to the Great Sacrament of Holy Communion. Morning by morning in the Koperkerk the pattern of Christian worship unfolds, providing for delegates an experience of fellowship in Christ, and a vision of the corporate worship which each separate church has discovered and developed.

Assembly News

Orders for Assembly News can be received at the book stall (price per 100 copies: 10 American dollars; £st. 2.10; 40 Swiss Francs). Assembly News will make valuable propaganda material for use in your home churches. Bound copies will be available for distribution early in October.

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Assembly gets down to work

Speeches, however moving and important, do not make the policy and practice of the Christian Church, or provide it with that sense of comprehensive consultation which is so vital in the construction of a world fellowship.

So it is right that the Assembly should move from the platform to the study, from the considered statement, delivered for all the delegates to hear, to the more spontaneous conversation of the selections and committees where the Assembly theme is opened up under the four main headings : The Universal Church in God's Design, The Church's Witness to God's Design, The Church and the Disorder of Society and The Church and International Disorder.

This serious conversation between the Churches of the world is a new experience for most delegates. Here is the world Church - if so far as it can be given visible representation - exposing the basic doctrines of the Christian faith to debate in the sharp light of man's modern situation with all the hardened problems of human life in evidence.

As "Assembly News" has surveyed the sections and listened in to the whole range of discussions it has been convinced that this organized attempt to bring about a "conversion to a common mind in Christ" among the members of the Assembly is an event of primary significance for the future life and fellowship of the Churches. Delegates may take home a mass of paper and personal notes, but unless they also take home the warmth of these encounters and share in the discipline of the "mind in Christ" they have not contributed their offerings to the up-building of the world Church.

This ecumenical debate is often a wearying and seemingly unproductive process. But it is part of the discipline of the whole church and only through this discipline can a common mind be evolved which all Christian men will recognise and be loyal to. Amsterdam is a contribution to this process which must be continued increasingly at the level of national and local Churches.

Queen's Message

The following message was read to the Assembly on Tuesday afternoon by Dr.W.A.Visser't Hooft, general secretary.

"Her Majesty, the Queen of the Netherlands, has requested me to inform you that owing to the circumstances that the dates of this Assembly coincide with the preparation for her Jubilee, it is impossible for her Majesty to give at the present moment such attention to the Assembly as she would desire to have given, since she follows the work of this Assembly with very deep interest".

Dulles Calls for Creative Leadership

"We are not here merely for a single inspiring experience. Rather we are here to create a world organization that will go on working daily to mobilize Christian power to break down the walls of division", declared John Foster Dulles, U.S.A., in his address on Tuesday, August 24. He emphasized the fact that the walls of division must be broken down both within Christendom itself and among the nations of the world.

Human Rights

Mr.Dulles called for the application of the moral law in the attempt to solve our modern problems. "No political or social system should prevail unless it is the means whereby men are consciously trying to bring conduct into accord with moral law and to enlarge the opportunity of men to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedom."

Communism, he said, fails at this point. "Marxian communism is atheistic and materialistic. Its leaders reject the concept of moral law. There is, says Stalin, no such thing as 'eternal justice'; laws are merely the means whereby those in power carry out their will, and human beings have no rights that are God given and therefore not subject to be taken away by man". How can these two great divisions of thought live together in the same world?

Mr. Dulles, while believing that under certain conditions collective force might be applied through the United Nations, feels that Communism cannot be overcome by force. "It would be wrong and stupid to use violence in order to convince people that violence ought not to be used".

Beyond Divisions

Professor J.L.Hromadka of Prague, at the same session, said, "The Church of Christ had got to go beyond the present national, political and 'block' divisions. She cannot, if she be loyal to her mission, identify herself with any group of people. She sees more clearly (or ought to see more clearly) than any statesman, politician or philosopher

where present humanity finds itself. Without illusions and self deception she is aware of the terrific dangers present at the bottom of the Western and the Eastern heart. "There exist movements and tendencies which understand under liberty and justice something very different from what we in the east understand by them. There are people who in the name of freedom are backing groups responsible for the break down of freedom and democracy.

"The Church of Christ being free of illusion and of cheap optimism, is equally free of hysteria, panic and despair. She summons all of her members, and indirectly, the people beyond her boundaries, to start from the bottom and to work for a new order. There is no real freedom, no real justice without a total submission to Him who has come to give us life and give it more abundantly".

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All addresses in the Concertgebouw, the meeting place of the Assembly, are being translated into English, French and German (the official languages of the Assembly) by means of an IBM short-wave radio simultaneous translation system. 1,500 sets have been provided. The only trouble is that due to a duplication in wave lengths the delegates are likely to turn in jazz along with a most solemn speech.

Youth Speaks

"Praise to the Lord! The Almighty, the King of creation!" sung by the Youth section of the World Council of Churches opened its meetings prior to the opening of the General Assembly. The first meetings on August 20 and 21 were for the purpose of mapping out work and responsibilities for the two weeks of the Assembly. The two days also helped to give orientation assistance to the youth delegates. The introduction of delegates at the opening meeting of the youth section showed that every continent and practically every nation were represented. Only the Churches of Russia and Japan did not send delegates to the youth section.

Worship for the opening session was led by the Rev.P.Fagel, youth secretary of the Dutch Reformed Church. Miss Joan Fraser, secretary of the youth department of the World Council, Mlle Madeleine Barot, president, youth department of the World Council, D.T.Niles, minister of a Methodist church in Ceylon and secretary of the district synod, and William Keyes, secretary of the youth department of the World Council in New York City, served as a panel presenting necessary information and guidance to the youth delegates.

Bishop Berggrav's famous statement "To be a Christian to-day is a dangerous thing" set the tenor for the plans for work undertaken by the youth section. Friday, August 27, a plenary session was held by the youth delegates, in which groups presented the results of their studies concerning reconstruction, student exchanges, relationships with other departments of the World Council, work camps, leadership training, public relations and publicity, and World Council of Youth Commission dealings concerning their constitution, third world conference programme, budget, staff.

Youth delegates began to grasp the scope of their representation when area reports of youth activities and needs were given of Africa, Latin America, Greece, the United States, Asia and the Philippines.

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Christian Witness To-day

The first Public Meeting of the Assembly was held in the Concert Hall Thursday evening, August 26, with the Archbishop of Upsala in the chair. It was a gathering which expressed the Christian concern for the world. Pastor Martin Niemöller, Germany, M.Philippe Maury, France, Prof.John Baillie, Britain, and Miss Sarah Chakko, India, were the speakers.

"It is as men have observed the characteristic response of Christians to the totality of our human situation," Dr.Baillie pointed out, "how they disciplined their private lives, how they conducted their households, how they behaved towards their neighbours, how they faced the blows of fortune and met the last enemy, and the relation in which they stood to the Great Power that rules over all... that they come under conviction of the truth of the Christian faith". The trouble is that not enough Christians live their faith. "They have been content to protest their belief when they ought to have exemplified it. They have argued for the truth of their faith when they ought to have been living witnesses to it", Dr.Baillie said.

M. Maury also maintained that too few Christians are witnesses of the Christian Gospel. "Witnessing is just what we have not done and what we are not doing. We have only to look at the world to realize the vastness of our field of action and the ridiculous incompetence of our efforts; we have only to look at ourselves to be assured that, far from having announced to the world that Jesus Christ is its Lord, we have not been able to convince ourselves of that fact." M. Maury emphasized the point that in Christ we have a triumphant Saviour who has overcome the world. In Him is our hope. "A refusal to believe in the inevitability of war, to resign ourselves to injustice, to be content with an easy scepticism, those are some ways of telling of our hope as well as in preaching Jesus Christ in so many words. Only one thing matters: to remember that He alone is our hope and that apart from Him there is only failure despair and death", M.Maury concluded.

Pastor Niemöller, after reviewing the disorder of the world and the "bankruptcy" which has overtaken the Christian Church, declared that it "is beyond our power to restore order to this chaotic world. We Christians cannot and must not dissociate ourselves from this universal confusion and thus awaken false hopes. We are called to reflection, nay, to repentance. We have indeed a message for the world. But it is not our message. It is God's message which we are to speak, the witness of Christ, the message of the Cross. This message comprehends the dignity of human life, but not a dignity which we have and possess, which we claim as a right. The message entrusted to us says that God in His incomprehensible mercy, as

revealed in Christ, has bestowed on us a dignity to which we are not in any way entitled - which enables us in the midst of a chaotic world that is clearly rushing to disaster, to live as men and women yes as children of God, wherever and whenever we rely in faith on His promise. While we do not have a programme of salvation for the world, this does not mean that Christians should not render, in so far as possible, deeds of mercy," Dr.Niemöller declared.

"It is true, we cannot realize the right order of society, because such a thing does not exist in this decaying world," Niemöller maintained: "Neither can we establish permanent peace and abolish war, just as we cannot get rid of conflict and murder in individual human life. But it is still our duty to work for better social orders and conditions, and to work seriously for the abolition of war. For Christ's sake we have to bear witness that God is the God of justice and peace, that He does not want chaos and war, that the Church therefore cannot tolerate the conditions of this world, especially because it looks for help to God alone, and not to itself". Dr.Niemöller closed with the words: "We are weary of our own ways; we all have reason to doubt our own powers and to despair. But for that very reason we are called afresh to proclaim the great deeds of God and to make the Christian message heard and seen in the world."

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Woman To-Day

Two cheers broke out early in the life of the Assembly when the place of women and the place of laymen in the Church were mentioned. Women attending the World Council had already had the advantage of being present at a pre-Assembly conference at Baarn. There is obviously a deepening sense of the Biblical foundation of men's and women's relationships. Professor Barth directed the Women's Committee to this point. Men and women have each separate contributions to offer and also a mutual contribution. Secular society is undoubtedly ahead of the Church in the use it makes of the contribution of women. Many women in the Assembly feel that the World Council must secure more adequate help from women on its major committees. The Church must make women feel that their services are really wanted, and that when offered they will be fully and adequately used. The problems of status, salaries and pensions must be faced.

Women on their side should take opportunities as they arise and should expect to undergo a thorough training as is required for comparable professions. Millions of women in the intellectual, professional and industrial groups have lost all touch with the Church. Many feel the Church has no place for their particular gifts. The Church must use this great untapped reservoir of ability and devotion.

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Alternates Meet

Running alongside the main sections and committees of the official Assembly are the Alternates' sections and committees which provide an additional contribution to the stream of ecumenical debate.

As all Alternates are present at the Plenary Sessions and participate in all the main events the two divisions are kept together, and it is already clear that the Alternate contributions are going to be highly relevant when the Assembly's Message is prepared. Another advantage in the purely practical arrangements of the Alternates' sections is the smaller groups they provide for. One section manages to get into the Koepelkerk vestry and another sat in a circle in a Y.M.C.A. room. This makes for closer debate and conversation and saves the Alternates' sections and committees from becoming pitches for speech making. The desire to make speeches noticed in Delegates' sections is absent from the Alternates' meetings. But the same problem remains - how to secure in a short time immediate contacts in fellowship and speech so that the preliminary barriers are quickly disposed of.

By means of the Alternates' attendance at Amsterdam the World Council secures the contribution of some 900 people to the ecumenical debate and manages also to balance out the life of the Assembly and so save it from age and overplus of officialdom.

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Mr. Charles P. Taft, President of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, presented 8,000 Dutch Gospels of St. John to one thousand Amsterdam children last Wednesday afternoon at a special ceremony at the Oude Kerk. They were a gift of New York's Daily Vacation Bible Schools. Each Gospel enclosed the name, age and address of a New York child, with the request, "Write me and tell me about the Assembly of the World Council of Churches."

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Amsterdam is "all dressed up" for the Assembly. This is due to the Jubilee celebration. Flags, lights on the canals, and special decorations add to the attractiveness of the city.

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Religious films are being shown daily to non-accredited visitors. Church World Service films are "The Road We Walk" and "Seeds of Destiny". Other presentations are "Faith Triumphant", "The Home", "Oslo 1947", "Day's Work", all by Religious Films Ltd., and "Hungry Minds" by the National Film Board of Canada.

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Various national delegations have had meetings, including the French and German delegations. It is hoped to arrange mutual private consultations.

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Confessional groups have held "family gatherings" - the Methodists needing the small Concert Hall for theirs. The Congregationalists are visiting historic "Pilgrim Fathers" sites in Amsterdam and Leyden.

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All delegates are commenting on the astonishing feat of organization performed by the Geneva staff of the World Council in organizing the Assembly with all its intricate range of meetings. The Amsterdam Committee for local arrangements, too, works with astonishing efficiency.

E.P.S.Geneva

